



Proponent Testimony to Senate Bill 173
Senate General Government Committee
Nazek Hapasha, League of Women Voters of Ohio
April 24, 2024

Chair Rulli, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Demora, esteemed members of the committee, and hard working legislative staff:

As the Policy Affairs Manager of the League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO), I am honored to advocate for all Ohio voters as well as our dues-paying members, who live in every Senate District of this state. The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. Ohio's elections system is very decentralized, and in working to ensure that our local elections officials are supported in their awesome task of carrying out elections, we strive to develop strong and positive relationships with Boards of Elections and elections officials across the state. Our members are typically one of the few - and sometimes the only - people in a public meeting of a county Board of Elections. And so we are well acquainted with, and often are witness to, the increased suspicion, harassment, and threats that elections officials faced in the past several years.

While I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 173, I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to highlight just a few of the many reasons that have contributed to the need for this bill, which is a small step in the right direction for election officials.

The situation across our local Boards of Elections is dismal and alarming. Elections officials have long been overworked and underpaid. They are the frontline workers of our democracy, tasked with upholding an entire elections infrastructure and carrying out elections in communities across this state. Nevertheless, their experience and expertise are often disregarded in the policy making process. And for years now, the rise in partisanship across this country that is exemplified in Ohio has caused them undue harm from extremists. On a regular basis, they are threatened and harassed for simply doing their jobs with integrity.

The combination of these threats present a looming crisis for Ohio. Many news outlets have reported a surge of local election officials leaving their jobs in recent years, and we have personally heard from elections officials about how difficult it has been for them to retain their

staff. Senate bill 173 is a common sense bill that would provide a much needed measure of protection by exempting the residential and familial information of elections officials from being disclosed as a public record. The League is pleased to support this bipartisan bill and hope that the Senate will work with the House to ensure the quick passage and enactment of this bill.

I am happy to answer any questions. Please feel free to contact me to discuss further at nhapasha@lwvohio.org or 614-469-1505. Thank you.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio was formed in May 1920 out of Ohio's woman suffrage movement. The League is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League has over 4000 members and 34 local Leagues across the Buckeye State.